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In Defense of Prince Edward County of Virginia

SPEECH

OF

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OF VIRGINIA

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Wednesday, May 17, 1961

Mr. BYRD of Virginia. Mr. President, the people of Buckingham County, Va., on Friday May 12, 1961, observed the bicentennial anniversary of the county's formation. I was honored by an invitation to participate in the observance.

Buckingham County is an adjacent neighbor of Prince Edward County. The citizens of the two counties are of a kindred spirit. The people of Buckingham have great sympathy with their friends in Prince Edward, who have been under attack by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, through Federal courts and otherwise, for 10 years.

I share the concern of the people of Buckingham, and all of Virginia—and I hope of the Nation—over the problems which the NAACP has produced in Prince Edward County; and I take pride in the fortitude demonstrated by the citizens of Prince Edward in defense of principles in which they believe and rights they hold dear and especially I commend the efforts of the white citizens of Prince Edward County to give educational facilities to the Negro school children.

I stated my views on this matter at Buckingham last Friday, and I ask unanimous consent to have excerpts from my statement published in the body of the RECORD as a part of these remarks.

There being no objection, the excerpts were ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

A DEFENSE OF PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY

Action by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People resulted in

withdrawal of Prince Edward County support of public schools. Under NAACP influence colored leaders in the county will neither provide for education of their children nor accept assistance from the white people of the county.

In short, the NAACP is more interested in the integration of public school children than it is in the education of colored children; and the NAACP, alone, is responsible for the fact that 1,700 colored children in Prince Edward County are not now attending good schools with qualified teachers.

White people of the county deplore the fact that colored children of the community are being kept out of school; but everyone should be aware that so long as this condition can be maintained, the NAACP and others can make propaganda use of it to discredit the county's efforts to restore full and complete educational facilities. This has been done and it is being done now.

White citizens of Prince Edward have successfully established a system of accredited schools for their children, and they have offered to do the same thing for colored children. This offer has been open and standing since December 1959, but parents of only one colored child have dared to submit an application for enrollment.

When Negro leaders did nothing to provide education for colored children in the county, white citizens formed a corporation in the name of "Southside Schools, Inc.," to provide educational opportunities for Negro students. Officers of the corporation communicated with parents of every potential colored student in the county.

In a letter to every Negro parent in Prince Edward, dated December 19, 1959, R. B. Hargrove, president of the corporation said:

"Southside Schools, Inc., has been formed to provide schools for those Negro children who have not been able to get an education since the public schools were closed this fall.

"It is our intention to set up good schools, get qualified teachers, and, so that the Negro children of this county will not lose time from school, to run these schools at least 180 days, which is a full school year. The actual location of the schools and the securing of the teachers will be determined after all applications have been received.

"There are funds available from the State of Virginia to pay tuition for children when public schools are closed. The board of this corporation has set a tuition charge of \$240 per child. Therefore, each parent can apply for this money after enrolling, which will pay for educating your child. How to do this will be explained to you and help given by this corporation after your child is enrolled in school.

"Enclosed is an application for registration. Please fill it out and return it to Southside Schools, Inc., Post Office Box 164, Farmville, Va., as soon as possible but not later than January 15, 1960. No application received after January 15 will be accepted.

"We urge you to mail your application immediately as we must know as soon as possible how many pupils to prepare for."

The letter enclosed a form for use in applying for admission to the school. The form consisted simply of blanks for the name; date and place of birth; grade completed, and last school attended; and the name and address of parent or guardian; signature and date.

At the end of the letter, there was a postscript which said:

"If you are in doubt about the meaning of anything in this letter we urge you to see the member of the board of directors living nearest you. He will be glad to explain exactly what is meant."

To this date there has been only one application for school enrollment in response to this letter.

Members of the board of Southside Schools, Inc., are well known, outstanding citizens of the community. The Negroes of Prince Edward County have every reason to trust them, and confide in them. Many of them are known personally to people in Buckingham. Besides Roy B. Hargrove, the president, the board includes:

J. V. Lewis, vice president; J. B. Wall, Jr., secretary; R. M. Bradshaw, treasurer; W. J. Sydnor, Graham Raiford, J. Nat Wilkerson, C. W. Glenn, Mrs. Bessie W. Taylor, A. N. Fore, T. W. Brooks, Jr., R. E. Taylor, P. T. Atkinson, Fielder Hubbard, Ralph Carlton, Richard G. Nelson, and John Gates.

When this letter, offering schools to colored children in Prince Edward, went out, Oliver W. Hill, the Negro lawyer representing NAACP in Richmond, and Roy Wilkins,

NAACP executive director from New York, made a hurried return to the county. They showed up at a Christmas party for the county's colored children on December 23, 1959.

Hill used such an occasion as the Christmas party for colored children to tell their parents that:

"Some benighted individuals are trying to entice you away from your rights by promising you a private school.

"All you are losing is 1 or 2 years of Jim Crow education, but at the same time in your leisure you can gather more basic education than you would in 5 years of Jim Crow schools."

Accepting this kind of outside guidance for their "advancement," instead of the offers of assistance from their white neighbors who want to work with them for the establishment of schools, the colored people of Prince Edward County have ignored educational opportunities provided for them.

Noting the clear indications of intimidation by the NAACP—when only one application for enrollment was received—officials of Southside Schools, Inc., promised that the identity of applicants for enrollment would not be disclosed until the schools were open. But even this did not result in any more applications.

Later, members of the board of Southside Schools, Inc., personally visited their Negro friends in each magisterial district in the county, urging them to take advantage of the opportunities to get the schools open for their children.

After these visits they called an interracial meeting on June 30, 1960, for the same purpose. The proceedings of the meeting were not published, but the fact remains that all efforts to persuade Negroes in Prince Edward County to accept the educational opportunities offered to them have been totally unsuccessful.

Prince Edward supervisors have adopted ordinances to provide educational opportunities for all children, white and Negro. From the beginning the Prince Edward people have done all they could to encourage Negroes in the county to take advantage of the school facilities that were offered.

Great publicity has been given the Prince Edward case. Much of the publicity con-

sists of more propaganda than fact. A brief review of developments leading to present conditions might help to get the situation into factual perspective. Let me outline the facts.

For 10 years, since 1951, in and out of Federal courts, Prince Edward County has been under continual attack by the NAACP in its efforts to force integration of public school children, not only in Virginia but everywhere.

The NAACP attack started with a strike by colored high school students in the county on April 23, 1951. A strike of any kind in Prince Edward County is news. It is an agricultural county. There had never been a strike there before.

On the day of the strike the students said they wanted a new school. But when Oliver Hill showed up the facts came out. The effect of the strike was that of a publicity stunt opening the NAACP drive to force integration in the county's public schools.

This was followed in short order by NAACP moves to institute suits in Federal courts to integrate schools in Prince Edward County, and in communities in three other States and in the District of Columbia. By remarkable coincidence, all of these cases got to the Warren Court in time to be considered together.

Then came May 17, 1954, when the Warren Court handed down its original decision in these cases. The decision is now an infamous blot on our history. It disregarded judicial precedent; it usurped authority of sovereign States; and, in effect, it amended the Constitution by judicial fiat.

The illegality of the decision was emphasized by the fact that it reversed the traditional position of the U.S. Supreme Court, including the decision by Chief Justice Taft. There has never been a Federal law requiring integration of public schools. The only law on the subject ever passed by Congress provided for segregation in public schools of the Nation's Capital at Washington, D.C.

A year later on May 31, 1955, the Warren Court implemented its decision. Seven hours after this 1955 decision, the Prince Edward Board of Supervisors put county public school funds on a month-to-month basis, and 7 days later citizens of the county

in a mass meeting endorsed the board's action and moved for a system of private schools.

As the situation went through legal maneuvers in late 1955 and early 1956, the people of Prince Edward for nearly a year reflected on the position they were taking. On May 3, 1956, they presented their supervisors with a petition signed by more than 4,000 citizens affirming their determination to educate their children "in some other way if that be necessary to preserve separation of the races in the schools of this county."

The NAACP pushed the Prince Edward case into a Federal district court again, and then on through the Warren court again, and finally Judge Sterline Hutcheson was forced to rule, in August 1958, setting a tentative date for integration of Prince Edward schools in 1959.

The NAACP appealed this decision, and again in May 1959 a higher Federal court ordered Judge Hutcheson to integrate Prince Edward schools in September 1959. At this point Prince Edward supervisors refused to levy county taxes for integrated public schools.

Thus the NAACP forced Prince Edward County to abandon its support of public schools. The Prince Edward Educational Corporation, formed in 1955 to conduct an independent school system if and when that were necessary put into effect the plans it had ready for use under these conditions.

White people almost simultaneously began to urge the colored people of the county to take the lead in providing schools for their own children, and offered to help; but Oliver Hill told the Negroes to "get busy at the polls; throw out these stupid local government leaders."

When it became apparent that the Negroes would not take the lead in behalf of their own children, the white people of the county chartered Southside Schools, Inc., with a certificate of incorporation from the State Corporation Commission dated December 15, 1959.

The white people of the county are still ready and eager to help, but the fact remains that the NAACP, which precipitated the problem in the first place, is still keeping 1,700 Negro children in Prince Edward County out of school.